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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000105

SIPDIS
ADDIS ABABA FOR AU -- AMBASSADOR BATTLE
NSC FOR MICHELLE GAVIN
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/12
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PBTS](#) [ECON](#) [ECIN](#) [EPET](#) [PNAT](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: SPLM Presidential Candidate Arman on Election Prospects

CLASSIFIED BY: REWhiteehad, CDA, STATE, EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (c) Summary. On February 11 Charge d'Affaires met with the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement's (SPLM) Yasir Arman, Deputy Secretary General of the SPLM (head of Northern Sector) as well as the SPLM candidate for national president. An ebullient Arman charted an electoral calculus that would give him an edge over incumbent President Bashir and commented on how he planned to conduct the SPLM campaign in the North and South. The discussion migrated to Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) implementation and post-referendum issues and the urgent need for action on both fronts. We concur that Arman is a competitive candidate but continue to believe that the outcome of the election will depend largely on the probity of the voting process and on how popular or unpopular Bashir and the National Congress Party (NCP) are, two things that will remain unknown until the ballots have been counted. We continue to think that Arman has a steep hill to climb, but should he manage to make it to the top, there will be a fascinating new vista for Sudanese politics ahead. End summary.

Adding up the Numbers

¶2. (c) Arman was escorting out one of the top lieutenants of Osman Mirghani's Democratic Unionist Party when the Charge arrived, and when Arman returned to the office he explained with a broad smile that a large number of Mirghani's followers were unhappy with Mirghani's overtures to the NCP and were willing to talk with the SPLM. Arman said that his optimistic public statements about besting Bashir in the April national elections were backed by solid numbers. He said that the SPLM would receive more than three-million votes from the approximately 4.3 million voters registered in the South. He added that NCP Presidential Advisor Salah Ghosh had confided to SPLA General Mathok that the NCP thought that Arman and the SPLM would garner as many as four-million more votes in the North. If this estimate were correct, Arman said, he would be the clear favorite going into a second round.

¶3. (c) Arman said that he planned to dial back the rhetoric and run a positive campaign even if the NCP attempted to drag the SPLM down into the mud. He admitted that there were a number of issues at play that would affect the tenor of the campaign. First and foremost, he did not know if the NCP would allow an unfettered campaign, or if they would resort to bureaucratic obstruction and the heavy hand of the security services to disrupt the opposition. There was also a serious security deficit in the Darfur states that

the NCP could exploit. However, he concluded, the NCP was unpopular with most of the people in Darfur, both Arab and African tribes; with the Nubians in the North; along the Red Sea coast; in many North/South border areas; and increasingly with young people in the central riparian area from where the NCP draws most of its support. Arman said that northerners who want unity realize that electing the SPLM is the best means of ensuring it. He discounted the argument that the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment against Bashir had whipped up a wave of nationalism that would sweep Bashir and the NCP back into office. To the contrary, Arman interpreted recent public incidents in which Sudanese had thrown shoes at or insulted Bashir in State House and at a large public funeral as indications of a growing lack of respect for and fear of the president.

14. (c) Charge pointed out that a credible election would bestow increased legitimacy on whoever prevails on the national level, and that the same will hold true in Southern Sudan. It was important that opposition parties be allowed to campaign without obstruction and that SPLM candidates contesting the same seats instruct their supporters to avoid violence. Arman said that he fully concurred, and that the SPLM understood that it too needed the legitimacy an election would bring, especially if the North reneged on the January 2011 self-determination referendum. At that juncture, it would be essential to have a duly elected legislative assembly in the South to decide on the best course of action. Arman said that the one caveat was Lam Akol. He posed no threat to Salva Kiir's

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election as President of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), but the SPLM would not tolerate Akol's use of militia forces to foment disorder.

Looking to 2011 and Beyond

15. (c) Charge observed that the elections are only two months away, and the referendum ten. Arman replied that the SPLM was seized with the urgency of the situation and alarmed by the complexity of issues that must be resolved in less than a year: elections, referendum, a political deal in Darfur and the ICC. He said that it was unlikely that the movements in Darfur would agree to any political settlement until they saw what emerged from the elections. He thought that it would be much easier to broker a deal were the SPLM to win.

16. (c) Charge said that the P-5 Chiefs of Mission had met with the AU Troika headed by Thabo Mbeki three weeks earlier and reviewed the work plan that Mbeki had submitted to the SPLM and NCP for comment. What was the SPLM reaction to this proposal? Arman said that he had met with Mbeki two days before, and that there was clearly a role for Mbeki, although Arman refused to be further drawn out on the subject. Charge asked about the idea US role, to which Arman replied that it was essential that the US remain involved as a guarantor of any agreements that emerged from negotiations between the two parties. He said that he did not foresee a major role for the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) in post-referendum issues, a view that echoed what we have heard from the NCP. Arman concluded by stating that he expected the NCP to resort to its usual stall tactics to impede implementation of unresolved CPA issues, although he thought that they might be more willing to show good faith in discussing post-referendum issues, especially the big three of wealth-sharing, nationality, and management of borders. He said that the NCP had still not named its candidates for the Southern Sudanese and Abyei

Referenda Commissions; Charge reminded him that neither had the SPLM.

Comment

¶17. (c) Arman made a good case for his prospects as a candidate, but we still believe that he remains the underdog, albeit one with teeth. We cannot say if the argument that Arman's election would improve prospects for unity will resonate in the North, but we are convinced that his triumph at the polls may be the last and only means of making unity attractive enough for southerners to take a second look. A Bashir win will virtually ensure the separation of the South, and even an Arman upset would not necessarily guarantee the reverse. It would yield, however, a radically altered political dynamic for dealing with Darfur and engineering an amicable separation/federation of the North and South. It would also create an interesting shift within the SPLM, whose core constituency and leadership would remain in the South, but whose most influential member would suddenly be a Northerner from Khartoum.
WHITEHEAD